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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 001712

SIPDIS

STATE PASS USTR FOR DOUG BELL

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ON U.S. - UAE BILATERAL

RELATIONS: SAUDI ARABIA

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: On April 16, Ambassador called on long-time presidential advisor Mohammed Habroush Al-Suwaidi to review our bilateral agenda (FTA, MLAT, and Camel Jockey Trafficking). On FTA, Al-Suwaidi opined that there was no reason the process would not move ahead. The concerns of some businesspeople about the agency law should not override the interest of the nation, which was to conclude an FTA as quickly as possible, he underscored. Al-Suwaidi suggested that the U.S. explain its reasons for wanting to separate out Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty negotiations from extradition negotiations in as simple, straightforward a way as possible.

He added that both sides should endeavor to move forward and not let one issue stymie progress. Al-Suwaidi called the practice of using children as camel jockeys a violation of their human rights and said that the practice must be stopped. Al-Suwaidi told Ambassador that the Saudi crackdown on extremists was not a complete solution, since it did not fix the fundamental problems in the Kingdom, including pervasive corruption. He also said that Saudi relations with their neighbors were poor and that the Saudis continued to object to the proposed Qatar-UAE causeway. End Summary.

FTA - No Need to Prolong Negotiations

¶12. (C) Ambassador told Al-Suwaidi that the second round of FTA negotiations would take place in Washington from May 10 to 12. Al-Suwaidi replied that he did not see that there were any major issues that would force the negotiations to be prolonged unduly. He agreed with Ambassador's observation that much of the "opposition" to the FTA stemmed from ignorance and that outreach to the UAE business community was important.

¶13. (C) Ambassador highlighted a few areas of concern for Al-Suwaidi, including labor rights and the Agencies' law. Al-Suwaidi emphasized that the concerns of agents were "not valid" and short sighted. According to Al-Suwaidi, agents should work for their money and the practice of getting paid "for lying in bed and not working could not continue." He noted that the world was getting smaller through globalization and that it was far better for the UAE to make changes now, while it had some control over the changes, rather than be forced to change in the future. He told Ambassador that individual interests should not outweigh the interest of the majority, which was in an FTA with the U.S. He said that President Khalifa and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) both wanted this FTA to move forward.

MLAT

¶14. (C) Ambassador briefed Al-Suwaidi on the progress of the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) discussions. She explained that the USG preferred to keep the discussions on MLAT and extradition on parallel, but separate tracks, whereas the UAE Ministry of Justice preferred to negotiate the two as a package. Al-Suwaidi replied that both sides needed to look at how to move forward. In his view, the way to do this was to move forward in stages and not tie issues together, if this stalled progress. He suggested that the USG prepare its points in writing for the UAEG to review, since some objections were likely due to a lack of understanding on the part of the UAEG. He stressed that "the simpler" this memo "the better."

Camel Jockeys

¶15. (C) Ambassador noted the steps that the UAEG has taken to deal with the problem of using children as camel jockeys, but asked for more action on rehabilitation and rescue. She said the Minister of Labor had invited her to join him on April 18 for a visit to an Abu Dhabi Emirate rescue center. Al-Suwaidi emphasized that the use of children as camel jockeys was a violation of their human rights and was not consistent with the traditions of the UAE. He noted that, in

the past, the UAE had held camel races on celebratory occasions, such as Eids or marriages and that the camel owners or their children had been the jockeys. The use of foreign boys was a fairly recent development. He stressed that it was not fair to use an 8-year-old boy as a jockey for 6 years then "throw him away" after he was no longer useful. The job took away the "best years" of the boy's childhood and left him with no education or useful skills. He noted that the lure of large prizes in current races made people lose perspective, but stressed that the practice needed to be stopped. Although Al-Suwaidi stated that poor source countries also shared responsibility for the problem, he stressed that the UAE must not be instrumental in supporting this traffic.

Overall Bilateral Cooperation

16. (C) Ambassador told Al-Suwaidi that overall cooperation between the U.S. and the UAE was excellent in a number of areas, including military-to-military, counter-terror and counter-terror finance. She expressed appreciation for the UAE's efforts to increase security to the U.S. Mission after the March attack in Doha, Qatar.

17. (C) Ambassador noted the Supreme Petroleum Council's (SPC, of which Al-Suwaidi is a member) recent decision to negotiate only with Exxon/Mobil for the 28 percent stake in the Upper Zakkum field. Al-Suwaidi explained that the SPC had made the decision after long and careful consideration. He emphasized that Upper Zakkum is a complicated field, with high reserves, but a low recovery rate. The UAE, he said, preferred to go with a company that had the technology to increase the rate of recovery. He also acknowledged that the UAE preferred to deal with one of its current shareholders (such as Exxon/Mobil) rather than a new company, since its shareholders had "stayed with" the UAE when prices were low..

18. (U) Ambassador also expressed appreciation that UAE President Khalifa would attend the May 3 F-16 handover ceremony at Al Dhafra airbase.

Saudi Arabia - instability and attitude a problem

19. (C) Al-Suwaidi raised his concerns about Saudi Arabia with Ambassador. He noted that Saudi instability could spill over to affect its neighbors. He emphasized, however, that he thought the Saudi solution to the terrorism problem -- i.e., a crackdown -- was not the right approach, because it didn't address the "fundamental problems" in Saudi Arabia. He said that some changes, such as in the education system, take time, but that the Saudis were not addressing urgent issues that could be resolved quickly, such as tackling corruption.

10. (C) Al-Suwaidi also noted that the Saudis were on bad terms with their neighbors. He cited Saudi objections to the proposed UAE-Qatar causeway. He said that the Saudis were "envious" of direct UAE-Qatari contact and that it was frustrating to the UAE. He explained that if the Saudis had taken a different attitude to the GCC when it was founded, political integration would be much further along than it was. He gave as an example Sheikh Zayed's more nuanced approach to creating the UAE. He allowed the individual emirates to retain their authority, even when the constitution provided that the authority resided with the federal government. Over time, the individual emirates realized that they were much better off under a federation and ceded more of their authority to the federal government. The Saudis, for their part, had not followed this gentle approach and the GCC had suffered as a result. He stressed that the Saudi policy in a number of areas, including objecting to the Bahrain - U.S. FTA, was short sighted.
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